

THE
REAL REPRESENTATION
OF THE PEOPLE.

BY C. BRADLAUGH.

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La multitude qui ne se réduit pas à l'unité est confusion. L'unité qui n'est pas multitude est tyrannie.—PASCAL.

La multitude, c'est la société: l'unité, c'est la vérité—c'est l'ensemble des lois de justice et de raison qui doivent gouverner la société.—GUIZOT.

Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human wants. Men have a right that these wants should be provided for by this wisdom.—BUCKLE.

ANY one reading the parliamentary debates of 1793 to 1798, and again those immediately preceding the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832, will at once perceive how much of political power has been conceded by the governing classes to the governed on a pressure from without, and how little concession has been obtained by the people from their rulers from a sense of justice, when the demand has been unaccompanied by a powerful popular agitation. Enlargements of political privileges have been granted not cheerfully, but with fear and murmuring, and after a long and angry resistance. In the late debates on the reform question in the House of Commons, the working classes were, with some justice, upbraided for their apathy, yet when formerly active in their own interest they were not unfrequently the victims of state prosecutions for treasons and misdemeanours. I desire to see renewed political activity, believing that the present enormous and wasteful expenditure of the English Government calls for interference on the part of the people, who are the contributors of the great bulk of the revenue. Such an interference is only usefully practicable when a wide extension of political power has been obtained by the masses, and an alteration of the suffrage has rendered the House of Commons something nearer an assembly of the people's representatives. The unenfranchised are at the present time politically at the mercy of their more favoured brethren, and this subjection of one class to another is most disastrous in its effects on

both. That men educated as are the English people should be controlled without the right to express an effective opinion as to the direction of such control, is a wrong demanding speedy remedy.

Believing it to be impossible that the masses can in the future rest satisfied for a period of any considerable duration without the enactment of some measure of parliamentary reform, and knowing that the attainment of a successful issue on the part of the people to any reform agitation must depend on the justice of the measure agitated for, and on the ability of the agitators to enforce their demands by sound argument, I deem it my duty to bring specially before the working classes, who are most interested in the renewal of a movement for reform, certain views which appear to me of vital importance to them, and which are promulgated by a writer who declares that "the problem of constitutional organism is, in what manner the individuals composing the entire community are to be classed, so that no opinions or interests shall be unheard, or extinguished in representation;" and who quotes with approval the statement of Guizot, that "the object of representative government is to examine publicly the great interests and diverse opinions which, while dividing society, seek to overcome each other, in the just confidence that out of their debates will grow the knowledge and adoption of those laws and measures which best conduce to the interests of the country. This object is only attained by the triumph of a true majority, the minority constantly being present and heard. If the majority is displaced by artifice, the result is falsehood. If the minority is excluded from the discussion, it is an oppression. In either case the principle of representative government is corrupted." The writer to whom I refer is Mr. Thomas Hare, of whom John Stuart Mill, in the supplement to his treatise on Parliamentary Reform, says that "he has raised the principle of the Representation of Minorities to an importance and dignity which no previous thinker had ascribed to it."

Holding, as I do, the opinion that every sane human being unconvicted of crime should have the means of

exercising, through the electoral suffrage, an influence on the management of the public affairs of the state in which he or she is resident, I have been rejoiced to find in Mr. Hare's book an unflinching reply to one of the most vital objections made by those who contend against any considerable extension of the franchise to the masses. This objection was embodied by Mr. Burke in his expression of fear of a democratic majority, and is thus stated by Mr. Mill, who asks, "Why is nearly the whole educated class united in uncompromising hostility to a purely democratic suffrage? Not so much because it would make the most numerous class, that of manual labourers, the *strongest* power; *that* many of the educated classes would think only just. It is because it would make them the *sole* power, because in every constituency the votes of that class would swamp and politically annihilate all other members of the community taken together." That is, the minority who at present govern by the unjust exclusion of the masses from the exercise of the suffrage, claim to perpetuate this injustice, and to retain to themselves the usurped dominance, because they anticipate, at the hands of the people, the same kind of wrong which the masses suffer from them—namely, political annihilation. This political death (which occurring to any body of citizens is a most grievous injury to the state) has terror for the upper 10,000, notwithstanding which, they appear to deem it the rightful fate of the lower 10,000,000. John Stuart Mill says, "A person who is excluded from all participation in political business is not a citizen. He has not the feelings of a citizen. To take an active interest in politics is, in modern times, the first thing which elevates the mind to large interests and contemplations; the first step out of the narrow bounds of individual and family selfishness, the first opening in the contracted round of daily occupations. The person who in a free country takes no interest in politics unless from having been taught that he ought not to do so, must be too ill informed, too stupid, or too selfish, to be interested in them; and we may rely on it that he cares as little for anything else which does not

directly concern himself or his personal connections. Whoever is capable of feeling any common interest in his kind, or with his country, is interested in politics; and to be interested in them and not wish for a voice in them is an impossibility. The possession and the exercise of political, and among others of electoral rights, is one of the chief instruments both of moral and intellectual training for the popular mind; and all governments must be regarded as extremely imperfect until every one who is required to obey the laws, has a voice, or the prospect of a voice, in their enactment and administration." At present a fraction only of the community have a right to vote, the user of this right is far from complete, and a majority of the so-called representatives of the people are returned to the House of Commons by a minority of that fraction; so that, in fact, the minority of a minority rule the nation. This is clearly wrong, and the apology by the governing classes that theirs is the educated minority is deprived of much of its force on examination. Educated are the governors? Not so much in the wants of the poor as in the pauper toiler, not so fully in the needs of labour, as is the factory *employé*; in each phase of the labourer's existence various wrongs need remedy, and it is only in the living through these poor men's miseries that men can be educated to their full comprehension. There are many questions in the discussion of which the working classes are most fittingly educated to entitle them to a voice, and on which they have need as well as right to be heard by representatives from their own ranks. The pretence of education on the part of the politician is sometimes a tinsel, covering the most complete ignorance of the political requirements of the nation. An educated minority so misgoverned the uneducated majority of France that at last more than half a century of bitter wretchedness and starvation culminated in the decapitation of a king and a bloody convulsion of the nation. An educated minority in Austria at the present day rule by force against the will of the Hungarian, Venetian, and Gallician peasantry, and revolts and repressions result.

In our own country it has been the educated classes who

have impeded the education of their poorer brethren by the imposition of taxes on knowledge, and a variety of restrictions on the liberty of the press. To use the language of Mr. Buckle, "they could hardly have done worse if they had been the sworn advocates of popular ignorance." Especially have they hindered the diffusion of political information, and the pillory, prison, and transportation were the arguments used against the early instructors of the masses in their duties as citizens. The right to diffuse political knowledge amongst the crowd has been won by slow and painful processes, and in defiance of state trials, government-favouring judges, and county jails. No wonder that the masses have rested ignorant so long.

In England, even now, an educated minority waste in extravagant state expenditure million after million, coined by the hand labour of the political nonentities, who pay the taxes, and are deemed sufficiently educated to obey laws they have no share in making. Amongst the governing classes are some who from mean and selfish motives sustain a state of things which finds sinecures for younger sons; but there are many even in pure Belgravia who would willingly accord to the working man some share in the government, but who fear that if the right of suffrage be attained by the people, it will be used to destroy politically the whole of those in whom political power is at present vested. These urge that in every country, city, and borough the artizans and labourers outnumber the men of property and birth, and they declare their conviction that in a House of Commons returned by universal suffrage, there would be no justice done to the rights of property. If this argument were true to its fullest extent, it would only serve to show that those who have possessed the fullest opportunities for developing the national will, have not used their opportunities for the good of the nation. It can hardly be denied that the governing classes of the country have had to a great extent the power of controlling the education of the people, nor can it be contended that this power has been so advantageously used as it might have been if the real elevation of the masses had been sought.

So that in effect I reply, that even if the result of conceding to the working classes their political rights were as disastrous to the aristocracy as the most timid contemplate, yet even then there is no valid excuse for the withholding such political power from the people. Mr. Hare's proposal, which I desire to have discussed by my readers, meets this objection; and while he does not contend for such an extension of the suffrage as I should consider just, he proposes a scheme under which I conceive it possible to obtain the real representation of the people in the English House of Commons. Mr. Hare looks upon the Parliament House as a place where minorities, heresies, and protests of all sorts should be represented and entitled to a hearing; and in order to attain this he has in a most masterly manner framed a measure which should be fully examined by the people; for so long as the working classes are denied justice, and are not admitted to the suffrage in so ample a manner as to outnumber the upper class electors, it is to the working men that Mr. Hare's bill is peculiarly beneficial; and I trust that even if universal suffrage were obtained tomorrow the people would know that a permanent and progressive democracy can only subsist usefully by permitting its opponents to be heard in the national deliberative assembly. Guizot says that "an electoral system which in the formation of the deliberative assembly annuls in advance the influence and participation of the minorities, destroys the representative government, and would be as fatal to the majority as a law which in a deliberative assembly compelled the minority to remain silent."

At present elections are purely local, and the minority of electors in a particular borough are not only unrepresented, but are misrepresented. Of late several modes have been suggested for giving an effective voice to a minority; by limiting each elector to fewer votes than the number of members to be elected, or allowing him to concentrate all his votes on the same candidate. These various schemes are praiseworthy so far as they go, but they attain the object very imperfectly.

"All plans for dividing a merely local representation in

unequal ratios, are limited by the small number of members which can be, and the still smaller which ought to be, assigned to any one constituency. There are considerable objections to the election even of so many as three by every constituent body. This, however, under present arrangements, is the smallest number which would admit of any representation of a minority, and in this case the minority must amount to at least a third of the whole. All smaller minorities would continue, as at present, to be disfranchised; and in a minority of a third, the whole number must unite in voting for the same candidate. There may, therefore, be a minority within the minority who have sacrificed their individual preference, and from whose vote nothing can with certainty be concluded but that they dislike less the candidate they voted for, than they do the rival candidate."* Mr. Hare would have principles represented rather than places, and he would not confine the voters to a local candidate, but would widen their sphere of choice, and permit the vote to be given to any one who was a candidate for election anywhere in the kingdom. That is, supposing there to be in all 658 members of parliament, and a total of 1,316,000 electors throughout the kingdom voting at a particular election, he would divide the latter by the former, thus leaving a quotient of 2000, and he would allow any candidate who obtained 2000 votes throughout the whole kingdom to be returned to parliament. This would much modify the constitution of the House, even without any extension of the suffrage. For example, there are the various Trades' Unions unrepresented in parliament, and although numerically strong, they are spread over a wide surface, and are so weak in suffrage power in any given town or borough, that there is probably no locality where the Trades' Unions would have the ghost of a chance to carry a candidate; but given all Great

* These semi-dissentients might even amount to a majority of the minority; for (as Mr. Hare remarks) if fifty persons agree to combine their strength, who, left to themselves, would have divided their votes among ten candidates, six of the fifty may impose their candidate on all the rest, though perhaps only relatively preferred by them.

Britain, and a hundred votes in one city, and twenty in that borough, and ten in this town, and five in that village, and so on, and the quotient may be attained, and the Trades' Union may pick their best man, and compel parliament to receive him. So with the Co-operative societies, the Odd-Fellows, and other large friendly societies. All these with their wide influences, might gather the necessary number of votes from different corners of the realm. This portion of Mr. Hare's scheme provides for the representation of every minority of not less than 2000 electors and the representation is more nearly equalised than is otherwise possible. Every candidate who is elected can boast that he is the representative of a constituency unanimous in their desire for his return, and no voter can complain that he is misrepresented by a man he has voted against. Some candidates of great popularity will probably get more than the quota of votes required, and if all these were counted for him, the House would be deficient of members, as none are to be returned who do not obtain the quota. To obviate this, Mr. Hare proposes that no more than the necessary quota of votes shall be counted to any candidate, and that whoever obtains that number shall be declared duly elected; all surplus votes being transferred to some one else. For this purpose the elector is to put on his voting paper more than one name, so that if the first named have elsewhere the necessary suffrages, then the vote passes to the second, or in case he shall already have sufficient, then to the third, or fourth, or fifth, or sixth, or seventh, and so on. Thus while the vote would in any case only be counted for one candidate, it would be sure to be counted for some candidate, and would not be thrown away as many votes are at present. John Stuart Mill regards it as certain that this scheme would, if carried out, prodigiously improve the *personnel* of the national representation. "At present, were they ever so desirous, a great majority of the most distinguished men in the country have little or no chance of being elected anywhere as members of the House of Commons. The admirers, and those who would be the supporters, of a person whose claims rest on acknowledged

personal merit, are generally dispersed throughout the country, while there is no place in which his influence would not be far outweighed by that of some local grandee, or *notabilité de clocher*, who neither has, nor deserves to have, the smallest influence anywhere else. If a man of talents and virtue could count as votes for his return all electors in any part of the kingdom, who would like to be represented by him, every such person who is well known to the public would have a probable chance; and under this encouragement nearly all of them, whose position and circumstances were compatible with parliamentary duties, might be willing to offer themselves to the electors. Those voters who did not like either of the local candidates, or who believed that one whom they did not like was sure to prevail against them, would have all the available intellectual strength of the country from whom to select the recipient of their otherwise wasted vote. An assembly thus chosen would contain the élite of the nation."

The improvement anticipated would not be confined to representatives of minorities, better men would be chosen on either side. "A member who had already served in parliament with any distinction, would under this system be almost sure of his re-election. At present the first man in the House may be thrown out of parliament precisely when most wanted, and may be kept out for several years, from no fault of his own, but because a change has taken place in the local balance of parties, or because he has voted against the prejudices or local interests of some influential portion of his constituents." Instances of this have occurred, and will be familiar to the reader. "Under Mr. Hare's system, if he has not deserved to be thrown out, he will be nearly certain to obtain votes from other places, sufficient, with his local strength, to make up the quota of 2000 (or whatever the number may be) necessary for his return to Parliament. Consider next the check which would be given to bribery and intimidation in the return of members to Parliament. Who by bribery and intimidation, could get together 2000 electors from a hundred different parts of the country? Intimidation would have no means

of acting over so large a surface; and bribery requires secrecy, and an organised machinery, which can only be brought into play within narrow local limits. Where would then be the advantage of bribing or coercing the 200 or 300 electors of a small borough? They could not of themselves make up the quota, and nobody could know what part of the country the remaining 1700 or 1800 suffrages might come from. In places so large as to afford the number of 2000 electors, bribery or intimidation would have the same chances as at present. But it is not in such places that, even now, these malpractices are successful. As regards bribery (Mr. Hare truly remarks), the chief cause of it is, that in a closely contested election where certain votes are indispensable, the side which cannot secure those particular votes is sure to be defeated. But under Mr. Hare's plan no vote would be indispensable. A vote from any other part of the country would serve the purpose as well: and a candidate might be in a minority at the particular place and yet be returned."

In each election the votes are necessarily given by voting papers, bearing the name and address of the speaker, which are preserved, each quota being kept distinct, and in case of a vacancy occurring by death, or otherwise, the returning officer in direction from the voter is to send a circular letter to each of the electors forming the constituency of the member who had filled the vacant seat with a list of the new candidates, and the candidate obtaining the largest number of suffrages out of such constituency will be returned as duly elected to the vacant seat.

In the event of a member accepting office under government, a circular letter is to be sent to the constituency represented by that member, informing them thereof, and unless in reply at least one fourth express their dissent, the representative who has so accepted office under government will not vacate his seat.

While Mr. Hare's plan does not propose to equalise the electoral districts in any of the modes heretofore suggested, it of course fulfils the whole object of those who desire this equalisation; and, unlike all other schemes, is self-adjusting, the quota being declared at each election as before stated.

There are other points as to the ballot, the suffrage, disqualification of members, &c., upon which some differences of opinion may be expected. Mr. Hare objects to the ballot, and in another pamphlet this shall be fully discussed. The subject is of too much interest to dismiss here in a few lines only. Mr. Hare evidently hopes that undue influence will be so guarded against and checked by the heightened standard of electoral morals induced in the working out of the scheme of personal representation of which he is the author, that he provides for open voting by voting papers, signed by the elector, and these are to be delivered by the voter personally at the polling booth, save under special circumstances.

Mr. Hare's views on the suffrage are that the qualification should be accessible to every man when he acquires a home and settles to an occupation in life. He says with reference to woman, that given the same qualification as the man, there is no sound reason for excluding her from the parliamentary franchise. He would not disqualify judicial officers, clergymen, or officials from becoming representatives. Numerous readers will doubtless agree in thinking that too many probable causes of mischief abound in the adoption of this item. The Judge on the Bench who may have to try a political prisoner should be kept as free as possible from party bias. The system of government in England will most certainly have to undergo a thorough purification before civil service appointments can cease to be regarded as possible wages for ministerial support. He condemns the payment of members, but would limit each candidate's election expenses to £50. This sum would be a sort of guarantee against crowding the lists with sham candidates.

All the present machinery of elections would be thrown out of gear by the successful introduction of Mr. Hare's views. We should no longer have the inhabitants of each place divided into parties seeking to return their candidate against the desire of the political opponent. Instead of the elections being, as now, a contest for power in which some get their representative elected, and some vote and see all

their labours fruitless, and their political effort entirely wasted, we should have the election an endeavour to select the ablest representative, each voter knowing that if he had anywhere in the country a quota of sympathising electors, he was sure of being represented in Parliament by the man of his choice. At present our electoral system divides the voters into adverse parties arrayed under formal names, and prevents the expression of the true and individual opinions of the members of either party. "It lowers the force of thought and conscience, reduces the most valuable electoral elements to inaction, and converts the better motives of those who act into an effort for success, and a mere calculation of the means of accomplishing it." Mr Hare's plan would enable the individual expression of opinion to become a reality, not a sham; it would develop a more self-reliant tone in those electors who at present are crushed out of vigour by the consciousness of their numerical helplessness. It would enable them to enter the House of Commons gathering their votes from east, west, north, and south, who under the present system could never get a majority in any one place, and who yet perhaps are better entitled to rank themselves as representative men in the country than are half the elected members of the Commons House of Parliament.

Those people who have not yet the suffrage right should submit Mr. Hare's views to careful investigation, in order to ascertain whether the bill he proposes would, if enacted, result, as I firmly believe it would, in increasing their opportunities of acquiring the franchise, by placing in Parliament various men having knowledge of and trusted by the people, to whom parliamentary action is at present impossible. Those who hold the reins of government entirely in their own grasp should seriously consider whether it would not be far wiser to carry such a measure now they have the ability, and while there is no hostile popular pressure, than to wait until a stormy reformation has swept them from power, and a manhood suffrage, conceded to the agitated masses to prevent a continuance of riot and revolt, has politically annihilated the classes who have hitherto usurped the

entire government of the state. The governing minority might in a time of political repose, such as the present, gracefully enact Mr. Hare's measure on the ground that it was just and beneficial to the people; although, notwithstanding that it will be equally just in the next generation, its future benefits will be special to themselves. It would, however, be difficult for the minority of high birth and great estates to obtain the enactment for themselves from an irritated and overwhelming majority of a measure which, when themselves powerful, they had refused.

It is desirable that both sides should regard the question of the political enfranchisement of the people as of equal interest and common benefit. To adopt a phrase of Burke's, politics ought to be adjusted to human nature, and the proper business of the government ought to be, to ascertain the general wish and requirements of the nation, legislating in accordance therewith. In one of his speeches the eloquent calumniator of the French Revolution said, "The people will have it so, and it is not for their representatives to say nay;" yet either of the members now sitting for Manchester may hear that the non-electors, inhabitants of that city, have assembled to the number of 40,000 in front of the Infirmary, declaring in favour of some measure, and he may, under present circumstances, altogether disregard their united voice, because politically they are dumb. Each individual of the 40,000 may be a tax-paying, law-observing machine, but he is destitute of any rights as a citizen: he has no vote, no voice in the government of his country. The Imperial Parliament is elected without his sanction, he contributes no choice, has no part in its selection; all his duty is to obey its edicts, his privilege to pay and pine.

That a great political struggle is impending, must be evident to every student of history. In every nation of the world, each period of assault by the governed on their governors for the obtainment of some share in the right to manage the business of the nation, has been preceded by a strong expression of heretical views. This is natural, for what is the latter but the manifestation of an education incon-

sistent with political slavery? While the masses are ignorant they believe everything and remain without the suffrage, but as they are gradually educated to confute the delusions of their ancient teachers, the superstitionists who frightened their children with bogey, so they are also educated enough to dispute the dictum of the great landed aristocracy who treat the nation as in its babyhood, and declare it incapable of self-government. At the present moment the nation, by its wide and fast increasing out-uttered heresy, manifests a rapid extension of education, and I therefore do not believe that it will wait for a very long time before its attention is turned to the achievement of some such result as the real representation of the people in Parliament.

No conclusion can be fitter for this brief pamphlet than the renewed recommendation to our readers to obtain for themselves Mr. Hare's volume, of which Mr. Mill says that —“it deserves a high rank among manuals of political thought,” and that “the system it embodies will be recognised as alone just in principle, as one of the greatest of all practical improvements, and as the most efficient safeguard of further parliamentary reform.”